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Clarissa Dornier.

p. 2.



Illustrated by L. Harris, Corner St. Paul's Church Yt.

CLARISSA DORMER:

OR, THE

ADVANTAGES

OF

GOOD INSTRUCTION.



L O N D O N :

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CLARISSA DORMER:

THE parents of Clarissa Dormer were natives of one of our West India settlements. They were not black enough to be esteemed descendants of those unhappy beings whom perfidy or avarice brought into the hands of Europeans, nor yet so fair as to pass for natives of our temperate clime. Born amid the tears and groans of their fellow creatures, and taught by example to tyrannize over the miserable Africans, they were callous to their sufferings, and un-

mindful of the barbarities inflicted upon them.

One only child (Clarissa) was the fruit of their marriage, and heiress to their vast possessions.

Dearer to them than their lives or riches, they would not suffer her to be contradicted in any thing, from the moment her little legs were able to carry her; and from the instant she knew how to frame a wish or feel a want, her will was a law. Every slave on the plantation must serve her, in preference to any other business.

Can it be wondered at then, that, before she was five years of age, she was a tyrant?


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At a prodigious expence, a governess from England was engaged to attend her.

The gentleman who was agent for Mr. Dormer in this business, saw many before his choice was absolutely decided. He well knew the tempers and habits of those with whom the lady would have to deal; and he wished to act with justice on both sides.

At length, his choice fell on Miss Melville, a young lady born to happier prospects, educated under the eyes of the most tender and indulgent, as well as the most accomplished parents, whose pride she had been, and who had spared

no cost to bestow upon her a most liberal education.

Versed in all the elegant accomplishments, as well as the more solid and useful parts of female education, she was at once the woman of fashion and the domestic character.

Fortune, however, seemed to use her unkindly, by depriving her first of her parents, and then of a considerable part of her property, through the means of an unjust executor.

These losses were too severe to be viewed with indifference; but they were nevertheless endured with a degree of composure which

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proved that reason, and not passion, governed her mind.

Mr. Franklin's choice could not have fallen upon a worthier object; but, anxious, as he was to fulfil the commission with which he was intrusted, he yet felt it his duty to lay before the person he engaged, every particular relative to the family in which she was to reside.

“Mr. and Mrs. Dormer,” said he to Miss Melville, “have no other child than Clarissa; and I am sorry to say that she has been spoiled by too much indulgence. She must not be corrected; and even if she strikes you, you must

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not complain. Her parents are both passionate, and, I believe, proud of their wealth; yet they want not generosity; and I am persuaded, if you can but gain the affections of the child, you may live in comfort. Your good sense will lead you to adopt some means of gaining authority over a child, who, though wayward, is not destitute either of good nature or good sense. The salary is very handsome; and if, after twelve months residence, you do not wish to continue, they agree to pay your passage back to England. — You may take a few days to consider the subject, and I shall make no

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farther inquiries till I receive your answer."

The result was, that Miss Melville accepted the situation, embarked, and, after a fine passage, arrived safe at ———.

On her landing, she was received by Mr. Dormer, who conducted her to his plantation in the mountains.

Mrs. Dormer was a vulgar, untaught woman. She had filled her daughter's head with a set of ideas which served to put all order at defiance.

"Come, Clary," said she, "come, my love, and see your governess: she has come home with papa."

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Little Miss, who had no better English than the slaves with whom she associated, and upon whom no pains had yet been bestowed to correct it, pouted, flung, and said, "*Clary no go—Clary no like new govness—She stay play with black Susy, kill flies, and catchee de lizards.*"

Much persuasion was necessary to induce her to accompany her mother into the drawing-room. At length she complied, hid herself behind the door, and just took a peep now and then at Miss Melville.

"Will you not welcome me to your house, Miss Dormer," said

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Miss Melville, in the sweetest tone of voice imaginable.

Clara hung down her head.—
At length she gained confidence, advanced nearer and nearer, and soon became troublesome with her caresses.

“Poor thing!” said her mother, “I am vastly glad to see she likes you : she will learn all the better, and be so happy !”

The next morning Miss Melville entered on her task.

Clara was very averse to being taught ; but the gentle manner adopted with her, made the first day’s task pass off tolerably easy ; the second and third were not to

be complained of; but it soon became necessary to make use of bribes, and various other schemes, to induce her to read.

Miss Melville, however, found the mother more irrational than her daughter. She was constantly detaching her from her studies; sometimes complaining that too much reading would hurt her eyesight; at others, that she would study herself into a fever; yet she was constantly worrying her with enquiries respecting her improvement, and dictating the manner in which she should be taught. When she saw Clara appear unhappy at being called to attend on Miss

Melville, she would say, "Dear Miss, don't worry the poor child about her books; she has time enough before her; let her come to her lessons when she pleases: she will get on a great deal sooner for not being worried."

It required much patience to bear all this, but not more than Miss Melville possessed. She resolved to persevere in the use of every allurements she could invent to induce Clara to receive her instructions. The following circumstance favoured her wishes, and produced the desired effect.

At the time Mr. Dormer commissioned Mr. Franklin to procure

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a governess for his daughter, he impowered him also to purchase one of Stodart's best pianos, as necessary for her instruction.

Miss Melville being perfectly mistress of the instrument, it became a great source of amusement to the whole family ; Clara in particular became fond of music to excess, and was constantly importuning her governess to play to her.

In answer to her frequent requests, Miss Melville agreed to play her a tune every time she read a lesson, and informed her, that, as soon as she could read and spell, she would be capable of

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learning the notes, and playing on the piano.

“ Indeed !” exclaimed Clara.

“ Yes, indeed,” said Miss Melville ; “ and I believe you will soon learn to play.”

Clara paid great attention to her book, and soon learnt to read and spell with propriety.

“ I can read now,” said she to Miss Melville, “ will you teach me to play ?”

“ Willingly ; and I hope you will have patience to surmount every difficulty.”

“ Is music so very difficult to learn ?” said Clara ?

“ Yes,” answered Miss Melville,

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“if you mean to excel; and I hope that will be your endeavour: many pretend to play, who only know how to gingle the keys; but I hope, if you begin, you will be more than a pretender.”

As this was a science in which Clara particularly delighted, she made a very rapid progress, as indeed she did in every thing she undertook; but unfortunately she had many bad habits, as well as real errors, from which it was necessary she should be reformed. Among the most prominent of these was the vice of lying.—The following anecdote will shew some of its effects.

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Among those things upon which Miss Melville set the highest value, were the letters of her deceased parents, which she kept locked up in a trunk, and would often retire to read them in private. She had miniatures of her parents, which were kept in the same place.

One day Clara caught her with the picture of her mother in her hand, weeping over it. Unwilling the child should see her in tears, she hastily returned the miniature to its place, locked the box, and came away.

Clara related what she had seen to her mother, who, with a curio-

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sity natural to little minds, was eager to discover the secret into which her daughter was unable to penetrate.

Mrs. Dormer requested Miss Melville to visit a lady at the next plantation; and Clara, the moment her back was turned, seized the box, and conveyed it to her mother, who had not time to satisfy her curiosity before Miss Melville returned for an ornament which she had left in it through mistake.

The box was not to be found. Mrs. Dormer and her daughter declared that they knew nothing of it; but a slave, who had acci-

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dentally seen it in Clara's arms, as she carried it to her mother, said, "*Missy Melville, you no cry—me telle you where de box be.*"

"Oh, where, where, good Dinah, tell me," returned Miss Melville; "I would rather lose every thing else in the world, than that box."

"*Missy Clara,*" replied Dinah, *carry it to Madam, in de dressing-room.*"

Miss Melville hurried to demand her box.

"Who told you it was here?" said Mrs. Dormer; "I have not seen it; and I am sure Clara never touched it."

"No, that I did not," cried the

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young lady, encouraged to assert a falsehood by the example of her mother—"Dinah has been telling you some story about the box, I suppose."

Dinah was called.

"Do you know any thing of Miss Melville's box, Dinah?" said Mrs. Dormer.

*"Me see Missy Clara bring de box ———"*

"Hold your tongue this instant," cried Mrs. Dormer, in a violent passion; "call the overseer; let him see Dinah flogged for an hour, and let it be done immediately."

"For mercy's sake, Madam, I



intreat you, and beg as the greatest favour, that you will not punish the poor creature," said Miss Melville; "she meant no ill—she did not mean to offend—pray spare her, and let your anger fall upon me."

"Upon you!" exclaimed Mrs. Dormer; "I cannot flog you; but I have her in my power; and she shall be beat till I have pieces of flesh from her back."

Mrs. Dormer in this said no more than she saw executed. Poor Dinah was tied by her two hands to the whipping-post; and the brutal overseer, as unfeeling as his barbarous mistress, inflicted the

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punishment, till the poor slave, unable to endure more, sunk beneath the lash, without exhibiting any signs of life.

“ You have killed her,” said Miss Melville, running to the assistance of the unfortunate girl, “ you have killed her; and for what? for telling the truth? — Yes, shame on you, Clara! you know you took the box from my chamber, and carried it to your mamma’s; and yet you could see this unhappy girl beaten almost, if not quite to death, for declaring what she had seen—Where is your feeling? Where is your humanity?”

“ A fig’s end for feeling and hu-

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manity too," replied Mrs. Dormer ;  
" what has feeling or humanity to  
do with slaves ? We buy them for  
our use, we feed and clothe them,  
and we have a right to treat them  
as we please ?"

" You have certainly no right  
to treat them with cruelty or in-  
justice," said Miss Melville.

" Cruelty and injustice !" ex-  
claimed Mrs. Dormer ; " I beg,  
Miss, you won't put such nonsense  
into the creatures' heads, or they  
will mutiny, and perhaps murder  
us."

" They would do neither, I am  
persuaded, were they well treated,"  
said Miss Melville.

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“ You are very impertinent, Miss,” said Mrs. Dormer ; “ but I wish to have no more words at present.”

The following morning, when Clara attended her usual lesson, she could not help noticing the coldness and indifference with which she was treated by her governess. She felt it keenly ; and after endeavouring for some time to conceal her feelings, she burst into tears, and said, “ I know I was very wicked yesterday ; I told lies, and saw Dinah beat for telling the truth.—Oh, Miss Melville ! do forgive ! do pardon me !”

“ Your pardon does not rest

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with-me," said Miss Melville;  
"you may be assured that though Providence has suffered this poor creature to become a slave, you have no right to treat her with cruelty or injustice. A great and benevolent mind would use power only to promote the happiness of those who are under its government. You know not how much you may need the friendship of your slaves; and your conduct should be such as would entitle you to their esteem. I am sorry to see it otherwise. Your cruelty was manifested in the sufferings of Dinah; and the unjust punishment inflicted on her, was not your only

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fault; that was but secondary to your first; the untruth you told was the primary cause of the poor girl's sufferings. I have long endeavoured to instil into your mind a high value for truth, and an aversion to falsehood of every kind. I am grieved to see how very lightly you think of my lessons, and how poor a compliment you pay my instructions. Be assured, that lying is a most dangerous and detestable vice; and a liar is more to be dreaded than any other character. Locks, bolts and bars may secure us from the thief; but what can secure us from the tongue of the liar? How many

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scandals are fabricated—how many families set together by the ears—how many parents have their hearts turned against their children, husbands weaned from their wives, brothers from their sisters, and the most intimate, firm and steady friendships broken, by the tongue of the liar. I beg you, then, my dear Clara, never more to be guilty of a vice which is offensive both to God and man.”

Miss Melville's lessons, often repeated, made a deep impression on the mind of Clara. To the slaves she became gentle and kind; and during the illness of Dinah, which was the consequence of her un-

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deserved punishment, none attended her with more kindness than Clara, who endeavoured, by every means in her power, to make her amends for her sufferings.

Clara soon gained the esteem of all the slaves, and was so universally beloved, that there was not a person in the house, or on the plantation, but what would almost have sacrificed their lives to serve her. Mrs. Dormer was the only person who disapproved of the happy change in her conduct; natural affection, however, was a sufficient security for her kindness to her only daughter, and therefore Clara lived in friendship with all around her.


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About twelve months after the event which has been recounted, Mr. Dormer died, leaving to his widow the plantation, with the reversion to Clara, to whom he also left considerable property in the English funds. Unchecked by the power or influence of a husband, the widow now exercised her authority over the slaves with an iron hand. She not only had them punished unjustly, but frequently ordered the punishments to be inflicted with a severity too horrible to be described.—But

“ The worm we tread on, thus it feels,

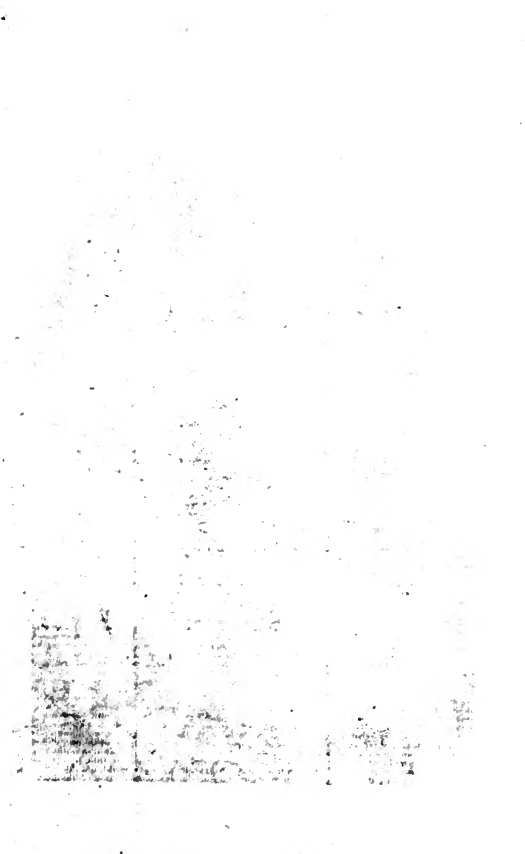
“ Resents the pressure of our heels,

“ And turns again.”

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A conspiracy, secret, and dreadful in its consequences, broke out in the plantation among the slaves, who rose in the dead of the night, to revenge the sufferings they had endured. About a dozen of these ill-used people entered the house of Mrs. Dormer, and murdered the overseer and whipper-in, and then proceeded to search for their mistress, who had retreated for safety, from her own apartment to Miss Melville's.

“ Oh, save me, save me !—the slaves have mutinied—they have killed the overseer and whipper-in, and are now searching for me—What shall I do ?—Where shall I





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conceal myself?" cried Mrs. Dormer.

"Hush! hush, madam!" said Miss Melville; "I beseech you be quiet."—She had just time to squeeze herself between the bed and the wainscot, before the slaves entered, brandishing weapons of different kinds, and enquiring for Mrs. Dormer.

Dinah was compelled to attend them, and to give them all the information they required.

"*Who be dat lady?*" said the ringleader to Dinah, pointing to Miss Melville.

"*She be good lady,*" said Dinah; "*she pity poor blacky man and wo-*

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man—she never get poor slave beat,
but cry, cry, weep, weep, to see dem
hurt.”

“We no killy you, Missy—we
only fight wid dem dat use poor black
ill—get him beat—order bad Jackson
to flog, flog, flog, till poor slave fall
down, almost dead.”

Clara was seized by another of
the slaves; but was set at liberty
after a similar account had been
given of her conduct by Dinah and
Susan; and they were ordered out
of the room, but with such marks
of respect as convinced them that
they had nothing to fear on their
own account; but their distress re-
specting Mrs. Dormer was great
indeed.

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In a short time they heard several of the female slaves cry out, “ *Jasper, Jasper, we find her—come, take de vile wretch away.*”

A shriek from Mrs. Dormer convinced Clara and Miss Melville what had happened. They attempted to appease the fury of the slaves by arguments and intreaties ; but in vain : they were commanded to be silent ; and resistance would have been irrational.

Mrs. Dormer was dragged to the very post at which her cruel orders had frequently been put in execution, and treated by her slaves with as little mercy as she had treated them. Their lives had

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been spared for future service ;
but they had no wish to see her
survive.

As soon as it was light, Miss Melville and Clara ventured out in search of Mrs. Dormer. Their imaginations had already anticipated the affecting scene. Clara fainted when she saw the mangled body of her parent, and was afterwards conducted by her amiable companion, to the next plantation. A little reflection, however, convinced them that they had nothing to fear from those DISCRIMINATING SLAVES who had deemed them worthy their clemency, at a time when they came to execute ven-


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geance on an individual under the same roof.

In a short time Miss Dormer undertook the management of her own affairs ; and Miss Melville was still retained, as her friend, adviser, and companion. No slaves were treated so well as those of Miss Dormer ; indeed it is improper to call them slaves ; for she made them all free ; and few plantations ever flourished like her's.

At a time when a dangerous insurrection broke out among the Maroons, over the greatest part of the island, the free men of Clara refused to join in the association ; and, by forming a phalanx round

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their mistress, preserved both her life and property, while those of many others were lost.

The moral of this little history will speak for itself. Humanity is due to all; difference of colour, or inequality of rank, can never warrant the exercise of oppression or injustice; and the abolition of the slave trade, lately effected by the persevering efforts of Mr. Wilberforce and the attention of a discerning legislature, is at once the best security for the peace and prosperity of our colonies, and an honour to the British character.



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